



## WILLAMETTE PARTNERSHIP

September 6, 2016

Harbor Comments  
U.S. EPA  
805 SW Broadway, Suite 500  
Portland, OR 97205

RE: Willamette Partnership comments on the EPA proposed Cleanup Plan for the Portland Harbor Superfund Site

Willamette Partnership is a conservation nonprofit. We have pursued an integrated and balanced approach to conservation outcomes over more than 10 years of work on a range of complex environmental issues (e.g., water quality improvements, sage-grouse conservation, and fish passage improvements). In the last 3 years, we have also played a lead role in looking at the health benefits provided by access to functioning ecosystems, and have been recognized with a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Culture of Health Leaders award. The Partnership's Board represents a diversity of interests across business, agriculture, conservation, tribal government, academic institutions, and local government. That diversity underpins a balanced approach to conservation that strives for solutions that will build resilient and sustainable communities. We are not experts on the Portland Harbor, cleanup of toxic sites, or Superfund statutes and requirements. However, we do specialize in creating holistic environmental solutions that create benefits for ecosystems, human health, and the economy.

We understand that EPA, the community, and other stakeholders have undertaken years of analysis and interaction to develop the alternatives and the plan now under consideration. We understand the nature of contamination and cleanup alternatives are complex given the site's location in one of the nation's major rivers, in the middle of a city and working port, and in an ecosystem significant for endangered salmon.

The purpose of Willamette Partnership's comments are to raise some broad level questions where the current plan seems to lack detail, justification, or a connection to a broader strategy to improve public health and ecological functions. Our comments reflect a concern about ensuring an integrated approach is used to meeting environmental and health goals—especially as part of an interim strategy that proceeds regardless of which cleanup option is selected.

### WILLAMETTE PARTNERSHIP COMMENTS

#### **1. We fully support a clean-up plan that makes habitat viable for native fish—migratory and resident.**

EPA should also consider how we can connect the cleanup requirements to the different limiting factors affecting listed salmon populations and other native resident fish. It seems that the ecological Remediation Action Objectives are solely focused on disrupting the accumulation of Contaminants of Concern up the food chain. This is important, especially from a human health perspective, but seems to ignore the salmon recovery needs for

Willamette River populations. The Plan should consider potential impacts and benefits to juvenile and migrating salmon. The clean-up requirements should incorporate the in-depth knowledge of habitat needs throughout the North Reach of the Willamette River, especially for juvenile salmon. This includes ensuring consistency between clean-up option selection, clean-up project design and mitigation, and the Natural Resources Damages process already underway. Mitigation for the negative impacts of cleanup activities on those species should begin immediately. Ideally, the cost, community acceptance, and long-term effectiveness criteria would all consider options that help meet the multiple ecological and habitat restoration needs for this reach of river.

**2. There should be no compromising on holding potentially responsible parties accountable for the costs it will take to bring the river back to a point where it supports healthy people and healthy ecosystems.**

We need to consider how we can maximize the health and environmental benefits of any cleanup solution, and not just through the lens of eliminating the most direct risk pathways to contaminants of concern. Cleanup will be a combined public and private investment, comprising entities that can and should be thinking about how a significant expenditure will lead to the kinds of health, environment, job, and community benefits that communities are demanding.

There also needs to be recognition that landowners along the river are looking at multiple regulatory challenges at once. Some of these include:

- Compliance with the new biological opinion on the National Flood Insurance Program and the need to ensure functioning floodplain habitat;
- Implementation of various stormwater permit requirements; and
- Meeting the City of Portland's requirements for protecting natural areas.

Willamette Partnership feels that EPA can address many of these multiple benefit needs by encouraging an interim strategy, regardless of a final cleanup option, that pushes for a holistic approach to advancing broad public health and broad ecological functions for native fish.

**3. We fully support a clean-up plan that reduces the public health risks for everyone—especially the communities near the Harbor and tribes facing the greatest disparities in health outcomes.**

However, the definition of public health used in designing the clean-up plan is incomplete. Fish consumption of resident fish is an important, direct risk pathway, but what about some of the broader risks communities face? For example, clean-up project design should address the impact of the expanded truck and barge traffic via diesel emissions exposure and associated health risk. Community groups have also identified strategies to increase access



to greenspace<sup>1</sup> and address income disparities<sup>2</sup>, which by themselves can improve health outcomes. These risks are critical to addressing the health needs of the communities most directly affected by contamination in the Harbor. Addressing both short and long-term effectiveness criteria, we need to consider how to address the total profile of public health risks. We know community stakeholders and EPA have considered some of these issues, but we remain concerned that the whole health picture is not being given enough weight.

With whatever cleanup option is selected, we should be maximizing the total public health benefit. And we should be doing that in a way that addresses some of the significant health disparities faced in Multnomah County<sup>3</sup>.

The primary health concern under CERCLA is reducing the health risks of contaminant exposure, and our interest in broader public health benefits may not alter the final clean-up design. However, reducing the immediate health risks of the community, broadly, should factor into the interim cleanup strategies that begin immediately. The interim benchmarks are unclear. How were these generated, how can they be implemented, and what flexibility might there be for strategies that hit the performance measures of improved habitat and lower cancer and overall health impact?

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposed plan and look forward to helping support a deeper consideration of how clean-up spending could best support community and ecological health. Our comments are most directly concerned with the interim measures that can and should be taken to make early, combined improvements in environment and health outcomes. Please don't hesitate to contact us if any of our comments need further clarification.

Sincerely,

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<sup>1</sup> Hartig, T., Richard, M., De Vries, S., and Frumkin, H., (2014). Nature and Health. Annual Review of Public Health. Vol 35. pp 207-228.

<sup>2</sup> National Research Council. 2001. New Horizons in Health: An Integrative Approach. Committee on Future Directions for Behavioral and Social Sciences Research at the National Institutes of Health, Singer BH, Ryff CD, eds. (Washington, DC: National Academy Press).

<sup>3</sup> 2014 Report Card on Racial and Ethnic Disparities. <https://multco.us/file/37530/download>